

CIVIC ENTERPRISES

1110 VERMONT AVE, NW SUITE 950
WASHINGTON, DC 20005
PHONE: (202) 898-0310

April 10, 2015

Chairman Charles Boustany
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives
Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Boustany,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources on March 17, 2015. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the good questions from you and Congressman Davis.

Please find enclosed my responses to those questions as well as a mark up of my testimony for the record.

If you have any further questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 202-898-0310.

Sincerely,



John M. Bridgeland
CEO, Civic Enterprises
Senior Advisor, Results for America

**Expanding Opportunity by Funding What Works:
Using Evidence to Help Low-Income Individuals and Families Get Ahead
Questions for the Record – Chairman Charles Boustany**

Responses by John Bridgeland on behalf of Results for America

Question 1

In terms of federal spending on these programs, what do we usually mean when we talk about a program that “works?”

When Results for America talks about a program “working,” we mean every program should have a clear purpose and strategy for implementation and follow the evidence. While the government typically collects a lot of data about the cost of programs and even how many individuals are served, these inputs and outputs do not necessarily track outcomes. RFA suggests that more programs should invest in tracking outcomes – for example, not just how many students are served by a tutoring program at what cost, but rather how those are students performing in school as a result of that tutoring intervention. We also mean how well a program is working compared to its cost. RFA thinks we should improve both the effectiveness and efficiency of government. In order to understand what programs are working, the federal government needs to invest in studies and evaluations and create an environment of continuous learning over time.

How do we judge programs now? Do we look at just the accuracy of programs or whether they meet immediate needs, instead of looking at the outcomes of those who are served? Can you share any examples?

We know that many programs are never evaluated and there does not appear to be a culture of using evidence to judge the efficacy of programs. In our review of non-defense discretionary spending programs, for example, we estimate that less than \$1 out of every \$100 is currently backed by evidence – not just Randomized Control Trials (RCTs), but any sound evidence. A GAO report detailed that 37 percent of program managers said that there had not been an evaluation of their programs in the last 5 years. Another 40 percent did not know whether or not an evaluation had been conducted. However, there are pockets of progress where we know what works as a result of a serious commitment to evidence, including SNAP and Home Visiting Programs.

For instance, there are eight social programs subject to RCTs that evidence shows “work” – Career Academies, the CAS-Carrera Program to combat teen pregnancy, Small Schools of Choice in New York City, the National Guard YouthChallenge, Reading Recovery, Success for All, LifeSkills Training and Multidimensional Treatment for Foster Care Youth. The Social Innovation Fund and Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund are tiered evidence programs that provide funds to grantees with an evidence base,

with greater funds going to grantees with greater amounts of evidence, while also requiring evaluations of all grantees to build the evidence base.

Some programs set aside a portion of funds for evidence-based activities. For example, in the last two years Congress has directed the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to set aside up to 5% of Mental Health Services Block Grant dollars for evidence-based activities. And several programs give bonus points to those grantees demonstrating evidence. Pay for Success is an interesting, new approach where government only pays for programs that deliver results, using private or philanthropic dollars to fund an evidence-based intervention up front. Federal policy has supported Pay for Success projects at the U.S. Department of Labor and the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Question 2

A key focus of the work of this Subcommittee is to design and administer programs that help people escape poverty and move up the economic ladder. Some argue our goal should be to reduce poverty by simply providing more benefits to more people. However, this misses the larger point. For example, we could create a program that randomly selects low-income families and individuals and provides them with cash. This would reduce poverty at least in the mathematical sense, as some recipients might now have earned income closer to or even above the federal poverty threshold. But would doing that be good enough for a program to claim that it is “effective” in your view?

The example illustrated in the question would not deem that program “effective” because it is not rooted in an evidence-based framework. The goal of social programs is not to foster dependence on government, but to provide a pathway out of poverty and toward independence. This can be accomplished even with programs that are designed to meet immediate needs of individuals or families for cash, food, or shelter. SNAP is a good example of a program that has a long track record of building evidence of what works, going back to the 1960s. SNAP helps 46 million Americans afford a nutritiously adequate diet. The outcomes of the program indicate that recipients with access to food stamps, compared to those without access, have much higher rates of graduation and earnings, and lower rates of obesity, heart disease and welfare receipt.

How do you think we should judge the success of programs for low-income individuals and families? Should the outcomes we seek be whether we have changed people's trajectory for the future by improving their habits, skills and ability to work, instead of simply providing them more money today?

Yes. Every individual wants the opportunity to climb ladders of economic mobility, have independence, and seek the American dream. One of the best anti-poverty programs has been a strongly bi-partisan one that provided benefits and incentives to work – the Earned Income Tax Credit, which has lifted millions out of poverty every year while incentivizing work. We have examined interventions in many discretionary programs to determine if a particular intervention with a targeted population

produces life outcomes, which is the ultimate goal. For example, we found that low-income schools that establish Career Academies, which combine academic and technical/career curricula, while offering workplace opportunities through employer partnerships, produces higher graduation rates and large increases in annual earnings.

***Expanding Opportunity by Funding What Works:
Using Evidence to Help Low-Income Individuals and Families Get Ahead
Question for the Record – Congressman Danny K. Davis***

Responses by John Bridgeland on behalf of Results for America

Question

Many providers of social service programs, like social work or psychology, are being educated and trained in evidence-based practice or using current best evidence to make decisions about the care of individuals or families. Do you think the federal government could be doing more, and providing more support, to help educate and train its workforce professionals to be able to analyze, support, and use evidence to strengthen social programs?

Yes. The federal government should use its resources to ensure federal employees know how to collect and use data and evidence to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of federal programs. Results for America has had ongoing conversations with federal agency staff on this topic, and we know firsthand there is a real desire to do this work. It is likely that federal agencies are not devoting enough resources to this topic. Our series of Invest in What Works Indexes, examining how well federal departments and agencies use data, evidence, and evaluation, has found that most agencies lack a Chief Evaluation Officer to spearhead such efforts. And a 2013 GAO study found that only 37 percent of federal managers reported that an evaluation had been completed in the past five years of any program, operation, or project they were involved in and an additional 40 percent reported that they did not know if an evaluation had been completed. This tells us that the federal government needs to improve its efforts, both in conducting evaluations to build the evidence base and in building the capacity of staff to collect and use evidence to improve federal programs.



April 10, 2015

The Honorable Charles Boustany, Chairman
Human Resources Subcommittee
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Response of Joan Entmacher, National Women's Law Center, to question from Rep.
Danny Davis

Dear Chairman Boustany:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Women's Law Center at the hearing on March 17, 2015 on Using Evidence to Help Low-Income Families Get Ahead. Following the hearing, I received an additional question from Representative Danny Davis. His question and my response are enclosed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Joan Entmacher'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names being more prominent.

Joan Entmacher
Vice President for Family Economic Security

With the law on your side, great things are possible.

11 Dupont Circle # Suite 800 # Washington, DC 20036 # 202.588.5180 # 202.588.5185 Fax # www.nwlc.org

Response of Joan Entmacher, National Women's Law Center, to question from Representative Danny Davis following the hearing on March 17, 2015, in the Human Resources Subcommittee of the Ways and Means Committee on Using Evidence to Help Low-Income Families Get Ahead

“Many providers of social services programs, like social work or psychology, are being educated and trained in evidence-based practice or using current best evidence to make decisions about the care of individuals or families. Do you think the federal government could be doing more, and providing more support, to help educate and train its workforce professionals to be able to analyze, support, and use evidence to strengthen social programs?”

The federal government could do more to help educate and train its workforce professionals to be able to analyze, support, and use evidence to strengthen social programs. For example, in the child welfare area, Congress could liberalize student loan forgiveness for public service employees to develop a more skilled workforce. It could allow Title IV-E reimbursement for child protective investigation training, to help front-line staff make critical initial decisions about whether neglect and abuse reports are sufficiently substantiated. It could allow Title IV-E federal reimbursement to states for all activities of the primary caseworker, including non-clinical counseling to children and families which is not currently reimbursable. More generally, increased federal funding to states under Title IV-E would allow for more manageable caseloads, more intensive casework, and wages and benefits that reflect the education and training necessary to do this challenging work.

However, when federal law and regulations establish standards and incentives that are not consistent with evidence-based practice, trained caseworkers are put in a difficult situation. For example, in the case of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), federal law requires states to meet their Work Participation Rate by ensuring that a certain percentage of their TANF recipients are engaged in narrowly defined “work activities.” Ironically, getting recipients into stable paid employment is not a key measure of success under TANF. Moreover, states can boost their Work Participation Rate by denying assistance – employment services or help meeting basic needs – to families with the greatest needs and greatest barriers to work participation, thereby eliminating them from the denominator. And caseworkers may be discouraged from connecting parents to the services that evidence shows are most likely to help them find jobs that will allow them to escape poverty, if participation in those activities does not count toward meeting the Work Participation Rate. With better designed program objectives and incentives in TANF to reward states for helping parents achieve long-term employment success and for reducing poverty, increased funding for staff education and training, and adequate services and supports for families, would enable the TANF workforce to use evidence of what works to design appropriate strategies to help families succeed.

With the law on your side, great things are possible.

generosity of welfare benefits will likely decrease the incentives for individuals to improve themselves. Such generosity may prevent them from engaging in meaningful activities that will boost their economic mobility. Instead of being a springboard, increased generosity could become a trap.

If you need any further questions answered about the topics covered during the hearing, please contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David B. Muhlhausen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David B. Muhlhausen, Ph.D.
Research Fellow

Question to Grover Whitehurst from Representative Danny K. Davis:

“Many providers of social services programs, like social work or psychology, are being educated and trained in evidence-based practice or using current best evidence to make decisions about the care of individuals or families. Do you think the federal government could be doing more, and providing more support, to help educate and train its workforce professionals to be able to analyze, support, and use evidence to strengthen social programs?”

Answer from Grover Whitehurst:

In my view, it is important for professionals who manage social programs and deliver social services to have better training in how to understand and use evidence to support their work. The federal government could be doing more to support better professional education around using evidence. One area in which the federal government has a unique role is in funding research and development to identify approaches to professional development in using evidence that work and are cost effective. I know of no present federal research funding that is devoted to that goal. The U.S. Department of Education could do more through its oversight of the postsecondary accreditation process to encourage accreditors of professional degree programs to consider the extent and quality of training in evidence use as one of the factors on which accreditation is based. Congress could provide permissive language the reauthorization of the ESEA, the HEA, and other relevant statutes that makes it clear that funds that are appropriated by Congress for professional development can be used to support training in the use of evidence.